

Cardiomyopathy

What is cardiomyopathy?

Cardiomyopathy (CAR-dee-oh-my-AH-puh-thee) is a condition that affects your heart muscle and can lead to heart failure. It is often genetic, but may be caused by autoimmune diseases (like lupus), infections, certain medicines, diabetes, thyroid disorders, drinking too much alcohol, or even extreme stress such as in the death of a loved one. Sometimes it can happen during the last trimester of pregnancy or the first few months after having a baby, but that is rare.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may be the same as for heart failure. You might have shortness of breath, low energy, cough, trouble breathing while lying down, edema (swelling of the legs or stomach), chest pain, and fainting.

How do I know if I have it?

If you have any of the symptoms mentioned above, you should be evaluated. Your doctor will ask about your personal and family history and examine you. He or she may do some tests on your heart and blood.

It is important to tell your doctor if someone in your family has cardiomyopathy because some types can run in families. Your doctor may do tests to see if you are at risk.

How is it treated?

Treatment depends on the cause of the cardiomyopathy and your symptoms. Medicines for blood pressure or controlling the heart rhythm may be useful.

If you smoke or drink alcohol, you may need to quit. You should eat less than 2,400 mg of salt per day. Exercise is important, but check with your doctor before starting an exercise program.

If you have heart failure, you may need surgery to put a small device in your body to help your heart work right. Heart transplant may be needed in the most severe cases of cardiomyopathy; transplantation is rare. A heart doctor can help you and your doctor decide.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

AAFP's Patient Information Resource

<https://familydoctor.org/condition/cardiomyopathy/>

National Institutes of Health

<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/cm/>

National Library of Medicine

<https://medlineplus.gov/cardiomyopathy.html>

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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